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SUBJECT: POPE'S VISION IN LINE WITH U.S. GOALS IN IRAQ,
MIDDLE EAST, AND FIGHT AGAINST TERROR

Ref: Vatican 5643

Summary

1. In his annual address to the Vatican Diplomatic Corps, the Pope emphasized the importance of the international community's working together to help the Iraqis to become self-governing with a democratically established political and economic system. Observing that Iraqis had been "freed from the regime that had oppressed them," he expressed hope that Iraq would become a credible partner in the international community. The Pope blasted terrorism and said that any civilization worthy of the name should categorically reject the use of such violence. He pointed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a root of destabilization for the entire region and urged "respect for the legitimate aspirations of both sides." The Pope also emphasized the importance of building a more effective collective security centered on the United Nations, and able to deal with the new challenges of terrorism it has failed thus far to master. End Summary.

Moving Forward in Iraq

12. In his annual address to the Vatican Diplomatic Corps, January 12 (full text sent to EUR/WE), the Pope acknowledged the "numerous steps" the Holy See had taken in the hopes of avoiding war in Iraq, but focused on the importance of the international community's working together to aid the Iraqi people. The Pope said the international community should now help the Iraqis, "freed from the regime that had oppressed them," to become self-governing with a democratically established political and economic system. He also called for Iraq to regain a credible place in the international community.

No to Terrorism - and no to War

13. The Pope strongly condemned international terrorism, asserting that it dishonored the causes it claimed to serve by sowing the seeds of hatred, fear and fanaticism. He stressed that any civilization worthy of the name should categorically reject the use of violence. Significantly, he told the gathered diplomats that the international community should never resign itself to "passively accepting the violence that holds peace hostage." To counter terrorism, the Pope said that "now more than ever" it was important to return to a more effective collective security centered on the United Nations so that it could fulfill the role envisioned for it. In any event, the Pope stressed "the one certainty" that "war could not resolve conflicts between peoples."

Return to Negotiation in Middle East

4. The Pontiff described the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian issue as a permanent destabilizing factor for the entire region, as well as a source of suffering for both peoples. He repeated his admonition to Israeli and Palestinian leaders that nothing is resolved by the recourse of arms, terrorism and reprisals, or by the humiliation of the enemy and hateful propaganda. He urged mutual respect for each entity's legitimate aspirations, as well as a return to the negotiating table. He said that concrete efforts on the part of the international community were essential to achieve a resolution to the conflict.

Conflicts the World Over Dramatic

15. Elsewhere in the world, the Pope noted the damaging effects of other conflicts; in particular in Africa. He observed that their impact on local populations was often

"dramatic," adding that they contributed to poverty and the deterioration of the institutional fabric, plunging people into desperation. The Pope also highlighted the danger of arms manufacturing and trafficking.

Religion: An important Role to Play

16. Not surprisingly, John Paul II stressed the importance of religious faith as a means to peace. He said that faith-based respect for inalienable human rights and dignity helped create a peaceful and peace-making world. In this regard, he urged secular states to do more than merely guarantee freedom of worship. Rather, he said, secular society should engage in a respectful dialogue with religions to enhance each nation's future. Church and State are not rivals, said the Pope, but rather partners in promoting the development of the human person as well as social harmony. The Pope said the difficulty some European countries had in accepting religion operating "in the public sphere" revealed itself in the recent debate on Europe's Christian roots in the EU constitution. He insisted that world leaders should see Christians as a resource -- particularly for the process of "education for peace," a major theme of his 2004 World Day of Peace Message (reftel).

Comment: Message Tracks with U.S. Policy

17. Though some U.S. critics might seize on the Pope's rejection of war as a means to resolve conflicts and his reference to the Vatican's efforts to avoid war, the core of Pope's message provided strong backing for priority U.S. goals in Iraq and the Middle East. The Holy See's preference to avoid war is well known; but its insistence that the international community should now move forward to help the Iraqis achieve a democratic self-government now that they have been "freed from the regime that had oppressed them" was a very positive message for the U.S. Similarly, the Pope's emphasis on a central role for the UN -- though implying criticism of the UN's being sidelined in Iraq -- reflects the Pope's new interest in revamping international law to deal with the challenges of global terrorism. All of this suggests that the U.S. has an important ally in the Pope for our goals in Iraq, the Middle East, and against terrorism.

18. Minimize considered.
Nicholson

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